

Carmel, NY- Joined by Rene Reyes-Cruz, a Vietnam veteran suffering from an Agent Orange-related illness that is presumptive of his service, Congressman John Hall (NY-19) announced today that the Veterans Administration has released final regulations outlining three new diseases—Parkinson's disease, chronic b-cell leukemia and ischemic heart disease—that have been added to the list of conditions considered to be associated with exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War.

Congressman Hall's announcement took place at the Leo Laders American Legion Post 130 in Thiells, NY. Also attending the event were Post Commander Donald Jowackum, Rockland County Veterans Service Agency Director Jerry Donnellan and a number of veterans. As Chairman of the Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, Rep. Hall has been a vocal and persistent supporter for the new regulation, which went into effect on September 1. Veterans exposed to herbicides while serving in Vietnam and other areas will now have an easier path to access quality health care and qualify for disability pay.

"This announcement marks the end of a year-long process—and an injustice that has lasted for more than four decades," said Rep. Hall. More than 19 million gallons of the herbicide known as Agent Orange were sprayed in Vietnam, and the VA has long acknowledged the severe health effects of exposure to these deadly chemicals. Last July, the Institute of Medicine issued a report of scientific findings concluding that these three diseases were likely to be connected with Agent Orange exposure. Thankfully, these new rules could offer new benefits and healthcare to 150,000 deserving veterans."

Rene Reyes-Cruz, a Monroe, NY resident suffering from Parkinson's disease, was awarded the Purple Heart for shrapnel wounds to his leg during his service in Vietnam. Reyes-Cruz served in combat in Vietnam from June 1966 to March 1967. He currently holds a 70% disability rating from the VA for combat wounds and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He was diagnosed with Parkinson's last year after seeing at least 5 different neurologists. In December of 2009, after a VA compensation and pension consultation, VA indicated that his claim for Parkinson's disease would eventually be processed under new Agent Orange Presumptive Regulations.

Any veteran who set foot in Vietnam from the years 1962-1975 is presumed by the VA to have been exposed to Agent Orange. The cost of the anticipated Agent Orange benefits is estimated to be \$13.6 billion this year, which was included in the supplemental appropriations bill in July. To process the new claims resulting from the new presumptives quickly without greatly

impacting the rest of the claims process, the VA is contracting for a private company to create an electronic, rules based claims processing system, which will later to incorporated in the larger claims system.

Veterans who have already applied for benefits based on these conditions, and veterans whose service connected disability claims for these diseases have already been denied, will be eligible for benefits. Also, the VA is required to review previous cases to see if a veteran is now eligible.

Presently, there are 12 other diseases considered by the VA to be associated with Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam, and two conditions found in the children on Vietnam Veterans.

Hall encouraged Vietnam Veterans with these three diseases to submit their applications to the VA so the agency can begin development of their claims under the new requirements.

Individuals can go to the VA website to get an understanding of how to file a claim, and what evidence is needed by VA to make a decision about disability compensation, or veterans can visit the veterans service section of his website for information on how to contact a Hudson Valley veterans service officer.